The Great Depression was a comprehensive catastrophe: not only an economic slump, it was a period of political breakdown, social disruption, intellectual illusion, and environmental disaster. And the catastrophe encompassed the globe. In industrial powers like the United States and Germany, mass production yielded to mass unemployment; countries reliant on agricultural exports, like Brazil and Indochina, watched international markets for their commodities collapse. The Depression’s hardships hit every country in the world.

The most traumatic crisis in the history of global capitalism, the Depression witnessed as well the reinvention of mass politics and the rise of the welfare state. Inspired by Nazism’s triumphs, rightwing mass movements radicalized during the Depression in places like France, Syria, South Africa, and Cuba. The political left was transformed by the millions of industrial workers who waged record numbers of strikes, organized insurgent unions, and formed the electoral backbones of center-left political coalitions in countries like Egypt, the United States, Chile, and Spain. Both right-based and left-based governments experimented as they sought solutions to the Depression, making it an era of tremendous state innovation.

At street level, the Depression was a human drama of suffering and endurance, performed by millions of common people. Unemployed workers, farmers in debt, farmers’ daughters sent off to the city, hoboes, and dispossessed peasants all responded to the Depression with their own everyday survival strategies. Though the Depression was global, your junior paper need not be. Research subjects as microhistorical as one village or one person are welcome, as are large-scale comparative and international subjects. One idea behind this seminar is that by engaging with each other’s work, you will all become more adept at weaving your own work into both local and global contexts.

Our readings will reveal something of the variety of questions open to you as you choose your junior paper topic. What caused the Depression? What is the relationship between demagoguery and democracy? Between popular agitation and government action? What sort of individual and collective strategies have people relied on in hard times? What was the relationship between the New Deal and Fascism? Between Nazism and Communism? What ended the Depression? When? Our seminar discussions will guide you in locating specific cases for you to investigate as we seek out empirical answers to big questions.

Sample readings:
Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*
Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*
Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*
Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*
Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*
Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*
George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”